

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 00309
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000309

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/04/15
TAGS: PREL MOPS DJ SO ER
SUBJECT: FW: AFRICOM DEPUTY YATES DISCUSSES REGIONAL SECURITY IN
DJIBOUTI

CLASSIFIED BY: James C. Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (D)

¶11. (C) Summary: During a brief visit to Djibouti March 23-24 by AFRICOM Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Affairs, Ambassador Mary Yates, GODJ and diplomatic contacts expressed guarded optimism on Somalia if the international community quickly provides support to the Somalia security forces. National Security Advisor Hassan Said emphasized GODJ's "one Somalia" policy, which encourages contacts with Somaliland and Puntland but no formal recognition, which, in the GODJ view, would lead to further conflict and splintering of Somalia along ethnic lines. On Eritrea, Chief of Defense Forces Fathi decried continued Eritrean construction of military facilities in the border area, and urged USG support to enhance Djiboutian naval assets to patrol coastal areas near the Bab el Mandab strait. In all meetings, Ambassador Yates underscored USG gratitude for Djibouti hosting Camp Lemonier and CJTF-HOA, and for our close mil-to-mil partnership. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) AFRICOM Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Affairs, Ambassador Mary Yates, visited Djibouti March 23-24. Host-country meetings included breakfast with the French and Ethiopian Ambassadors, UNDP ResRep, and former Djiboutian Minister of Cooperation and now senior advisor to the Prime Minister, Hawa Ahmed Houssien; an office call on Major General Fathi A. Houssein, GODJ Chief of Defense Forces; and a call on National Security Advisor Hassan Said Khaireh. Conversations focused on regional security issues, especially developments in Somalia and the Djibouti/Eritrea border situation.

Somalia: Guarded Optimism

¶13. (C) Both GODJ and diplomatic contacts emphasized Djibouti's close ties to Somalia, based on ethnicity, family, and commercial links. All interlocutors indicated they were hopeful for improvements in Somalia following election of Sheikh Sharif through the "Djibouti Process." Chief of Defense Fathi and NSA-equivalent Hassan Said stressed the need for early support to the new Somali government's security forces, particularly to pay salaries to discourage young fighters from joining private militias or

al-Shabaab. Said commented that the recent statement by Osama Bin Laden calling for Sheikh Sharif's overthrow would in fact strengthen the new president. Somalis reject these extremist calls and would be more inclined as a consequence to support Sharif. Diplomatic colleagues based in Djibouti commented that the statements by Osama Bin Laden regarding Sharif also showed that the new Somali President was taken seriously by those who oppose him.

Somalia: GODJ Strongly Favors "One Somalia"

¶4. (C) Hassan Said acknowledged close and regular contacts between the GODJ and the Somaliland and Puntland authorities, especially on security issues. He noted that GODJ, even with its limited means, had sent food and other support to Somaliland in the aftermath of the October 29 bombings in Hargeisa. Recently, the GODJ invited the Somaliland authorities to take possession of a small out-of-service boat at the Port of Djibouti for use by the Somaliland Coast Guard. Despite these practical examples of collaboration, however, Said and his deputy strongly reiterated GODJ opposition to any formal recognition of Somaliland or Puntland, arguing that the Darod/Dulbahante populated region of eastern Somaliland would seek to join its Darod cousins in Puntland and warning that the Issa in western Somaliland could seek to secede and join Djibouti. (Note: The GODJ closed Somaliland's diplomatic mission in Djibouti in 2006. End note.)

Eritrea: Continued Probing at the Border

¶5. (C) Chief of Defense Forces Fathi rued the duplicity of Eritrean President Isaias, whose forces have occupied the southern slope of Ras Doumeira since spring 2008 under the guise of building a civilian road in the vicinity. The Eritreans continue to build structures on Doumeira island. Tensions persist on the border, as Eritrean defectors continue to cross. In order to enhance Djibouti's ability to resupply and defend the border area, Fathi urged accelerated delivery of two 30 meter patrol boats requested for delivery in 2013 under the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program, and suggested that additional docking facilities at Ras Sian (about 50 km south of the border) would permit longer patrols in the vicinity of the Bab al Mandeb strait. Fathi noted that the Djibouti-Eritrea border dispute would soon again be before the UN Security Council, and expressed hope that this body could apply further pressure on Eritrea to withdraw its forces and participate in a diplomatic process to resolve the matter.

Comment

¶6. (C) Ambassador Yates' visit offered a valuable opportunity to underscore the close USG partnership with Djibouti, particularly on regional security issues. After hosting the "Djibouti Process" talks, the GODJ is eager to see progress in Somalia, and hence continues to press for international diplomatic support for the Somali government as well as practical assistance to its security forces. On the Djibouti/Eritrea border dispute, GODJ interlocutors emphasize a diplomatic solution via UN Security Council action, but CHOD Fathi's request for additional assets to patrol the coastline near Doumeira Island reveals continued GODJ interest in enhancing their ability to monitor the area and respond rapidly to any threat.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Yates approved this cable.
SWAN